

Executive Summary

The purpose of this research project was to provide a systematic evaluation of the performance of Florida's Commuter Assistance Programs (CAP) from two perspectives:

- Impact on the commuting patterns and awareness of the general public, and
- Impact on the commuting patterns and awareness of each CAP database of commuters, which are comprised of commuters who have called or otherwise applied for commuting assistance and/or information.

In South Florida, 525 members of the South Florida Commuter Services database (350 who joined in the last year, 175 from more than a year ago) were interviewed by telephone, randomly selected from the database. In Tampa Bay, 428 members (257 members who joined in the last year and 171 from more than a year ago) were interviewed due to the smaller size of Bay Area Commuter Services (BACS) database.

In total, South Florida Commuter Services has an estimated 10,297 validated database members, and BACS has 2,493. The validation estimate is based in part on the number of invalid telephone numbers that were reached during the interview process.

Total alternative mode use for South Florida Commuter Services is at its highest point since the evaluations began in 1997. For both agencies, 48% of validated database members report using alternative modes. Each South Florida Commuter Services database member, on average, made 205 less trips in 2001 than they would have had they driven alone, and, on average, made 131 less trips due to South Florida Commuter Services' influence. This resulted in 4,309 less miles driven on average per database member, 2,996 of which were directly due to South Florida Commuter Services' influence. In total, this resulted in 1.3 million reduced trips and 30.8 million reduced miles that were due to South Florida Commuter Services' influence.

For BACS, the corresponding figures are 217 trips per database member (157 which BACS influenced) and 3,677 miles reduced per database member (2,701 due to BACS influence), for a total of 392,000 reduced trips and 5.7 million reduced miles due to BACS influence.

Bay Area Commuter Services has done a more effective job of communicating the name of the agency to their members (34% unaided awareness versus 16% for South Florida Commuter Services, 85% versus 63% aided awareness for South Florida Commuter Services), but the South

Florida Commuter Services database members are more aware of the existence of the 1-800 telephone number for rideshare assistance (virtually no unaided awareness for either, 77% aided for South Florida Commuter Services versus 43% for BACS).

In 2001, only 19% of South Florida Commuter Services database members received a “no match” letter, down significantly from 31% in the previous year. Most of this increase translated into a higher percentage (56%) of database members who received a list but took no action. The proportion that tried to use the list remained approximately steady at 12% of the database. For BACS, 36% of database members said they did not receive anything as noted above, and a further 16% received a no match letter, meaning that 50% of the applicants do not recall receiving any information that helped them match with a carpool partner. In spite of this, a much higher proportion actually tried to use the information: 18% of all database members and 36% of all of those who received usable information.

South Florida Commuter Services may want to examine how BACS provides their match information. BACS, on the other hand, may want to examine South Florida Commuter Services’ procedures of information distribution, since many more people in the South Florida Commuter Services’ database recall receiving information. It is also possible that South Florida Commuter Services recruits a wider base of commuters, including current transit riders, who are not really interested in matching but are mainly interested in the Emergency Ride Home (ERH) program.

To maximize the percentage of people using the list, both agencies should focus on the following items:

1. Re-examine the product. The fact that 82% of the people who received names in South Florida failed to take any action (and 64% of those in the BACS database) suggests that there could be something inhibiting them from taking action. For the fourth year in a row, the quality of the list has received the lowest rating of effectiveness by database members.
2. Conduct qualitative research (e.g. focus groups) with database members to identify factors that encourage or prohibit use of the match list.
3. Re-examine South Florida Commuter Services’ level of assistance in the formation of carpools from match lists.

Both South Florida Commuter Services and BACS should take a great deal of pride in the high scores they receive in information accuracy, promptness, and courtesy.